

The Folk Dhadi Genre

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Dhādī refers both to a genre of Punjabi music and the performers who play it: a distinctly composed ensemble of ballad-singers. After briefly sketching the long yet hazy background of the art, this article reconstructs its more certain and recent history so far as it can be gleaned from the oral accounts of living dhadi performers. Taken with evidence of recordings—some of the Punjabi industry’s earliest—and the memories of older audience members, a picture is presented of the dhadi genre in its heyday of the early 20th century. The focus is on the dhadis who performed popular ballads; their prominent personalities, geographical distribution, compositional forms, narrative themes, performance manner, and other aspects of the genre are described. The article concludes with biographical sketches of two contemporary dhadis and a selection of texts of dhadi compositions.

In the world of Punjabi balladry, *dhādīs*—singers with *dhadd* [small, hand-beaten hourglass drum] and *sārangī* [bowed lute]—have occupied a special place. Indeed, comparable to other types of Punjabi balladry, this genre has come down to us as a true representative of Punjabi culture and heritage. The *dhādī* genre has remained capable of expressing Punjabis’ overflowing character, their way of life, rites and rituals, and so forth. And though its ambit continues to shrink under the influence of Western culture and the march of modernity, the dhadi art represents a great history of which Punjabis can be proud.

Background to Dhadis and Their Art

When one looks at the background of the dhadi genre it appears to be quite old. Evidence of this comes with the word *dhādhī*, which appears several times in gurbani. Sikh Gurus [Nanak, Amardas, Angad Dev, Arjan] referred to themselves as *dhādhī*, in reference to their role as someone who praises the Divine or who sings God’s glory.

- *ha’u dhādhī hari prabhu khasam kā, nitt gāvai hari guṇ chhantā.*
I am the dhadi of the Lord my Master; daily, I sing the songs of praise to the Lord.
- *dhādhī tisno ākhīe je khasame dharai piār, dar khar sevā karai gur sabadī vīchār.*
He is called ‘dhadi’ who has love for his Master; who stands by the door waiting to serve while thinking on the Word.
- *dhādhī dar prabhu mangṇā dar kade nā chhore.*
The dhadi begs at God’s door—the door he shall never leave.
- *ha’u dhādhī kā nīch jāti, hor utam jāti sadāide.*
I am of the low caste of a dhadi; others call themselves high-caste.

In everyday language the basic meaning of “dhadi” is one who sings someone’s praises whilst playing dhadd. According to the *Mahankosh*,² it is, “From *dhādhī*: one who sings the ballads of warriors while playing *dhadd* (*dhaḍḍh*); praise singer.” It used to be common practice in the courts of Rajput kings and nobles for Bhattas [a type of bard] or Dhadis to sing ballads [*vār*] about the feats of bravery of the nobles’ ancestors. Because this singing style was beloved of the common people, the Gurus also adopted its poetic form. They composed very many *spiritual vārs* in praise of the Divine, the full tally of which numbers twenty-two. The Fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, at the time of the *Adi Granth*’s compilation after he collated all the *bāṇī* [1604], set nine of these to be sung to the airs of previously composed vars of old warriors. Some examples of this type are:

Asā kī Vār – based on the var of Ṭundā Asrājai

Kāṇṛe kī Vār – based on the var of Mūsā

Vaḍhans kī Vār – based on the var of Lalā Bahilīmā

Rāmkalī kī Vār – based on the var of Jodhai Vīrai Pūrbāṇī

Sārang kī Vār – based on the var of Rāi Mahimā Hasanā

Gāuṛī kī Vār – based on the var of Rāi Kamāldīn Maujdīn

One must remember, however, that the relationship of these spiritual vars to the aforementioned warriors’ vars is limited to their melodies. As such, one can surmise that this singing style was known for rendering poetic forms of both spiritual and secular content. In order for Bhattas and

Dhadis to sing these vars, dhadd and sarangi would have been used because it is these instruments that are most associated with the form.

Though the background of the dhadi tradition is quite old, this art as we know it began under the patronage of the Sixth Guru, Hargobind [1606-1644]. The Fifth Guru, Arjan Dev's martyrdom had been a turning point in Sikh history. Guru Hargobind then had to challenge the imperial administration a number of times. In order to instill enthusiasm and zeal in the warriors of his armies, Hargobind began to have dhadis in his court to sing inspiring vars. Natha and Abdul [*sic*] were the famous dhadis of his court. Mushki and Chhabeela continued on the tradition of singing of vars in Guru Gobind Singh's court [1675-1708]. Thus, when Guru Gobind Singh came to the Malwa area and the local artistes Sukkhu and Buddhu of village Malooka performed Malvai music with sarangi for him, these minstrels easily found their way into the Guru's good graces and enjoyed a close relationship with the Guru's court. After the martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur [1716], when Sikh rule became divided [i.e. in the form of *misl*s], patronage of these dhadis ceased.

Around about this time, narrative verse in the form of *qissās* had caught hold. After Damodar's qissa *Hir* [ca.1600-1615], those of poets Ahmad Gujjar, Muqbal, Varis, Pilu, Fazal Shah, Hasham Shah, Qadar Yar, etc. also became popular in the villages. So it was natural that some singers performing with dhadd-sarangi would take a shine to these love ballads. During the era of Maharaja Ranjit Singh [1799-1839] and up through the first half of the 19th century, being a time of peace and prosperity, folk tales began to be commonly sung with dhadd-sarangi. Poets, minstrels and other artists achieved royal status. A shared culture had developed, and political turmoil had ended. It was during this time that the poet Qadar Yar's qissa of *Pūran Bhagat* came out, at the end of which he writes:

This qissa of Puran Bhagat was composed by Qadar Yar.

Some may read its *baints*; others may sing it, with dhadd and sarangi.

It is from here that the phenomenon of the *folk dhadi* genre was carried forward and gradually arrived in the village performance arenas.

Thus we see how things went on in the world of dhadi music. On one side of things was the phenomenon that used to be called *guru kā dhādī* and which became confined purely to the preaching of Sikh religion. Dhadis connected with this camp are faithfully engaged in keeping alive and spreading the dhadi's art in conscious and systematized form. The other camp was that which, being connected with Punjab's vast folk culture, made its balladry their customary repertoire. People

began to call these folks “minstrel” (*gamantrī*) and to call the ballad form that they perform *gaun*. They would sing whilst strolling about circular performance arenas. I shall call the latter performers “folk dhadis.” Herein I will only discuss the folk dhadi genre; discussion of the religious dhadi’s art can be found elsewhere.

The art of balladry principally relates to sound, though it may be executed by instrument or singer. Therefore, if we focus on sound, we can formulate some ideas about the art. Although the technology to make sound “immortal,” i.e. recording, had emerged some time previously, the first recordings of Punjabi folk balladry were made around 1929-30. One of these was of the folk dhadi genre. Although we cannot say anything positively about the dhadi genre before the time of recordings, we might surely make some guesses. The basis for these conjectures is the testimonies of the disciples of older singers and of elderly aficionados. The latter retain a passion for this music that, as in the manner of Jawala Mukhi, bursts upon their inner being knowing no limits. “The artistes of the past gave long, continuous performances. If singers nowadays, like singers of our time, were to ramble about the arena all night entertaining the people, some might actually be so bold as to *complain*. People nowadays can’t sit still.” According to information gotten from these individuals, in the “olden days” there were many minstrels who sang with dhadd-sarangi in this region whose contribution cannot be denied, and because of whom, the following generations (i.e. their disciples) were able to establish their own particular place in the world of balladry.

With regards to the spread of the genre after the middle of the 19th century, one more aspect to be noted is the phenomenon of royal patronage. The rulers of various states began to play host to these dhadis in their courts, and by means of them the court’s reputation was raised. The performers began to receive tips, gifts, and pensions from the courts in turn. The Maharaja of Nabha, the Maharaja of Patiala, and the Maharaja of Faridkot used to support them well. Loha Khera’s Modan Singh, who used to be called “The Tansen of Malwa,” was the state of Nabha’s court dhadi during the time of the Maharaja of Malwa Hira Singh. Nageena Mirasi of Bathinda was the ranking dhadi of his time. In 1925 he received a great sum for his art from the Maharaja of Patiala. Vadhaava Mirasi of Dhadde was the Maharaja of Patiala’s royal minstrel. The Dhadis of Gurm won a large award from the Maharaja of Patiala and received a monthly pension up until 1947. Ruliya Mirasi of Rauala was a sarangi master whom was patronized by the Maharaja of Faridkot, Harinder Singh.

Partap Singh Hasanpuria, Khiddu Mochi of Gumti Kalan, Munshi of Shero, Panj Garaianvala Dhadi, Magghar Shekh of Barnala, and Puran Jhiur of Dhanaula became the renowned dhadis of their time. The pillar of the dhadi genre, Ustad Dhadi Giani Sohan Singh Seetal Huran said

that his ustad, Chiragdin Bhariai of Laliani, was the renowned sarangi master of his time. It was under his patronage that Sohan Singh acquired training in dhadi music and earned the subtleties of this art.

The famed folk dhadi Didar Singh Ratainda's ustad, Bhagatu Ramgarhia, was the famous minstrel of his time, as was Koreana's Jaimal Singh, the well-known sarangi master; the latter was in fact Didar Singh's sarangi ustad. Dhadi Narain Singh Chandan's father, Karam Singh of Tuse, and grandfather were also their era's top-ranking dhadis. Pandit Kaanshi Ram Dohlon's ustad, Parmeshri Ram, was his time's renowned dhadi. Keeping the dhadi genre alive at the present time, the folk dhadi Vilayat Khan of Goslan's grandfather, Khairdin, and great-grandfather, Husain Bakhsh, were the original generation's top two dhadis.

Thematic Content

When we analyze the folk dhadi genre we find that some themes emerge. We can classify and sort traditional folk tales sung by dhadis according to these themes, e.g. in which the stories of *Hir*, *Sohni*, *Sassi*, *Mirza*, etc. are love stories of an erotic nature, *Puran*, *Gopi Chand*, *Kaulan* etc. are devotional, and *Dulla Bhatti*, *Jaimal-Fatta*, etc. are heroic.

Love stories. Folk dhadis continue to sing traditional, classical types of folk tales like *Hir*, *Sohni*, *Sassi*, *Mirza*, etc., along with the local love stories of *Indar-Bego*, *Kaka-Partapi*, *Jaikur Bishan Singh*, and so on.

Puranic episodes. A number of preceptive and instructive stories out of the *Ramayan*, *Mahabharat*, and *Purans* have continued to be sung, in widespread adaptations. These adaptations often times will be totally different from the forms contained within the ancient texts.

Tales of heroism. Various poets' writings about the valiant deeds of brave warriors also have continued to be sung by folk dhadis, among which *Dulla Bhatti*, *Jaimal-Fatta*, *Dahood Badshah*, *Sucha Soorma*, and more are notable.

Parables. Folk dhadis have maintained the custom of singing tales that illustrate moral and life lessons. These include such tales as *Puran Bhagat*, *Gopi Chand*, and *Shahni Kaulan*, along with which one also finds ballads of scholar-poets constructed on philosophical themes, like *Zindagi Bilas*, *Fanah da Makan*, or *Nasihath Bilas* [by Daya Singh, 1910s].

Although, in the main, the topic of “ishq”—intense love—has remained preeminent, this is not purely mundane love but rather a blend of *ishq haqiqi* (divine love) and *ishq majazi* (earthly love). It is as Varis Shah declared in the end of his *Hir*: *hīr rūh te chāk qalbūt jānoñ*—“Know Hir as both spirit and body.” This very tradition has been carried on. Bansī Lal of Nauhra also stated, in his *Hir*,

Bansī Lal has orchestrated a clash of soul and body,
Placing as pawn the figure of Ranjha.

This folk concept is the product of traditional custom in which it was characteristic of the discussion of divine matters to do so through wordly images. Indeed, devotees of “ishq” would take the name of archetypal lovers as they would take the name of God; “Hir Mai” is even a sort of goddess for them. In Sikh religious texts, too, comes mention of these lovers. Guru Gobind Singh, in his writings in the Dasam Granth, and Bhai Gurdas, in other writings, here and there articulated concepts of the Divine through symbolic reference to these figures. These folk tales were sung by folk dhadis in village religious-camps, near ponds, in spinning bees, and at the shrines and memorials of saints and holymen. People believed that illness, ill fortune, and troubled times would be warded off from places where such lovers might be mentioned, and happiness, peace, and brotherhood would flourish in their stead. Indeed, in villages, if somewhere sickness should befall the livestock, the gaun of *Hir* used to be specially performed.

Malwa, the Main Site of the Genre

Although the dhadi genre was popular throughout Punjab, its main area was Malwa. Even audiences for the dhadis of Doaba were mostly Malwai. This fact explains the saying,

The dhadd-sarangi plays in Malwa;
The jori [double flute] plays in Amritsar.

In Malwa, most dhadis are from Mirasi or Mir families; however, many dhadis connected with other castes have made a name. When we look back towards the genre’s roots it appears that the stylistic legacies of a few originally named dhadis have indeed been perpetuated. In the areas around Sangrur and Bathinda, Modan Singh Loha Khera’s disciples carried on his legacy, which evolved into a “gharana” [artistic stylistic lineage] of sorts. They often sang the version of *Hir* composed by Malwa’s well-known kavishar, Ganga Singh Bhoondar. Besides this, some among them also used to sing the *Hir* of Divan Singh of Shahina.

In the areas around Ludhiana and Faridkot, students of Kaanshi Ram Dohlon (the student of Parmeshri Ram of Bhaini Baringan) developed their gharana. They all sang and continue to sing the *Hir* of Hazura Singh Butahrivala. This version, surely a masterpiece, is set in the poetic meter of couplets called *kali*; it contains 996 kalis in all. Hazura Singh never had his *Hir* published, but of the ballad compositions recorded on disc, many are of this composition of his. In addition to this one, the abovementioned *Hir* of Bansi Ram is also common among the dhadis of this gharana. Finally, some dhadis also sing the *Hir* compositions of Ran Singh, Babu Razab Ali, and Maaghi Singh Gill.

Typical dhadi performers have sung the *Puran* of Karam Singh of Tuse. This composition, too, is a masterpiece, and after *Hir* it was the greatest of the gauns that used to be sung. The orally transmitted version of *Mirza* by Pilu was usually common, however, several dhadis also used to sing the *Mirza* by Dogar of Chhapar. The *Sassi* sung was by Natha Singh of Nararu. This, too, is a masterpiece in kali form. Among contemporary dhadis, *Bego Nar* in kalis, by Dila Ram of Matharu Bhoodan, is common, along with *Kaulan* by Bishan Chugawan, *Dhol-Sammi* by Ali Shah of Ghudani-Ghaloti, and *Raja Rasalu* by Puran Chand of Bharo.

Form

The folk dhadi genre is subject to three main poetic forms: 1. *baint*; 2. *sadd*; and 3. *kali*. *Puran*, *Kaulan*, and *Gopi Chand* are sung in baints. *Mirza* is sung in sadds. *Hir* and *Sassi* have been generally sung in kalis. Though these three ballad meters became universally popular among Punjabis, an honor is accorded to kali that is not accorded to the other forms. This is easily seen from the fact that regular folks refer to every form of folk balladry sung with dhadd-sarangi as “kali.” They would typically say, “Brother, give us the kali of *Mirza*” or, “Brother, give us the kali of *Puran*.” Thus the notion of “kali” has remained close to the heart of the common man.

Compared with the other forms of folk balladry (baint and sadd), kali is the most modern. It is purely Malwai and has its basis in folk-songs.³ This ballad form was originated by *kavishars* of Malwa, who sang in their performances without instruments.⁴ Among the old kavishars who polished this form we may include: Chand Singh Maharaj, Sher Singh Sandal, Ganga Singh Bhoondar, Babu Razab Ali, Maaghi Singh Gill, Hazura Singh Butahri, Ran Singh, Natha Singh Nararu, and more. Later on, dhadis singing with dhadd-sarangi adopted this kali form and gave it a respected place in folk balladry. Dr. Ajmer Singh, speaking to the development and spread of kali, says this about the form:

Due to geographic, social, and political factors, kali was born in Malwa. Minstrels of Doaba domesticated it, and throughout Punjab it gained renown.

The kali form was bred in the wilderness of the bush country. Kavishars raised it, and to dhadis it was wed. While kavishars sing kali without instruments, the minstrels playing dhadd-sarangi made it more popular. Thus kali is a wonderful and powerful combination of kavishari and dhadi traditions.

Aspects of the Genre

The folk dhadi genre has four main aspects: 1. discourse; 2. poetry; 3. singing; and 4. music. "Discourse" refers to the tale or story, and it is its main aspect. Upon this basis the poetry is created, to which music is sung along with dhadd-sarangi.

We find that recordings of the dhadi genre consist of isolated, main episodes taken from some tale. This was due to some fundamental limitations of the recording medium. On the old discs, one side could accommodate a composition (kali, sadd, or baint) of just two and a half or three minutes in length. Thus on one disc (of two sides) there would be two compositions. However, in typical concerts, dhadis sang complete tales. In order to advance the story, the leader would realize the narration of the tale in such vivid sonic images that it was presented before the audience "in living color," as it were. Even before the start of the singing, the audience members would become engaged with the minstrels. The dhadis delivered a sort of oration that was not prose, but rather was poetic and matched the character of the theme. Some examples follow:

*pūran bhagat nūn kaṛāhe de kol kharhā liā, aur tel
tarā-tar rihdai te pūran bhagat pramātmā nūn yād
kardai ki ajj lajjiā rakkh. bhāi natthe khān vajā sārangī
bhalā kaise kahindai bāi...*

The king had Puran stand by the cauldron and at once heated up the oil. And Puran invoked God, saying, "Protect my honour on this day." Brother Nathe Khan, play the sarangi—Now, how does he go on...?
(Didar Singh Ratainda)

jis vele khān mirzā māriā jand heṭhān, bakkī dharke mukkh vaiṇ pāundī ai o... tānī kī javāb kardī ai...

At which time Mirza was slain beneath the jand tree, [his horse] Bakki lied down and let out a sorrowful wail, oh!... And what response did Sahiban give...? (Didar Singh Ratainda)

mornī vargī bharjāi te mornī vargī naṇad ne pahin pachar ke rānjhe panchhī de darshan karan laī āpṇe ghar toṇ tiārī he... e... e... iuṇī kītī baī

The sisters-in-law got gussied up like peahens and, in order to have a glimpse of Ranjha, to leave home, they... hey... hey... prepared thusly: (Niranjan Singh)

jadoṇ mirza sāhibān nūn siālān toṇ laī jāndai tānī aggoṇ ḍogar pharoz puchchhdai. dassī khān nāzar siānī duābe vāliān kis tahrānī puchchhdā hai dostā...

As Mirza brings Sahiban from the Sials, up speaks Firoz the Dogar [Sahiban's uncle] and inquires. Tell us, Nazar of Doaba, friend, what it is he asks... (Nazar Singh)

āshakānī dī rāṇī hīr jaṭṭī ate loharīānī māri sāhitī rānjhe panchhī nāl javāb savāl kar rahī hai. malkīt singh pandher ate pāl singh panchhī talvanḍī mahllīā vālā he... e... e... iūnī dasdai

The Jatti Hir, Queen of Lovers, and the grief-stricken Sahiti are having an exchange with Ranjha. Malkit Singh Pandher and Pal Singh Panchhi of Talwandi Mallian shall... hey... hey... hey... tell us thusly: (Pal Singh Panchhi and Malkit Singh Pandher)

rājā rasālū husan dā bhikhārī baṅke satī kaulānī de būhe ute jāke uhdā sat bhang karnā chāhundā hai. sangat nūnī suṇā de chain siānī kivenī karnā chāhundā hai...

Raja Rasalu becomes a slave to Beauty and goes to the good Miss Kaulan's door wanting to slake his passion. Tell the people, Chain, how he acts on his desire...
(Chain Singh and Satnam Singh)

And with this the backing vocalists would start up the *mukhrā* [lead-in phrase to the refrain]. There would be a special style of mukhra, too. The first half of the composition's first line would be started on a low tone and taken up to a high tone, and they would deliver the lines of the mukhra at a fast or slow pace according to the meaning of the theme. Every dhadi would present it in a different way, as in the following examples:

*hār torke makar baṇā liā hīr ne,
lai makar baṇā liā hīr ne,
kite mel oe hoṇ sababbān de,
rugg bharke o kaḍḍh liā kāljā...*

Breaking the necklace, she made pretend, did Hir,
Lo, made pretend [to call Ranjha to help her], did Hir,
Saying, "I wish I knew why,
My heart had to be grabbed and torn out so"...

*chakiā jhammaṇ hīr ḍolī bahi gāi kheriān dī...
chhāl mār ke gaḍḍī de vich bahi gī nī,
merā kaḍḍ ke kāljā lai gī nī,
tūn rāh kheriān de pai gī nī,
gall mathī mathāi rahi gī nī,
aṇ hakkīān majjhīān chārīān,
jaṭṭ luṭṭ liā takht hazāre dā...*

Hir lifted the flap and sat in the palanquin of the Kheras...
She leap up and sat in the carriage O,
Ranjha: "You've stolen my heart and gone away O.
You have fallen upon the path of the Kheras O,
And your commitment to me left unfulfilled O.
The buffaloes are left to wander ungrazed,
And this Jatt from Takht Hazara is left looted"...

*mere mūnhon siphṭ nā sajdī hīr siāl dī...
kadd lammān te rang dī gorī bāi,
kite dhaun ganne dī porī bāi,
kite rām lachhmaṇ dī joṛī bāi,
gall suṇ oe ṭalle diā bāviā...*

Words cannot praise lovely Hir of the Sials.
 She is tall and her color is fair, brother,
 Her neck like a slender segment of bamboo, brother,
 You're as fitting a pair as Ram and Lachhman, brother,
 Listen O rag doll...

phūlān saṇe kuṛīān deṇ sunehā hīr nūn...
jogī indarpurī tasvīr kure,
koī ohde nālon sohṇī nā hīr kure,
jiveñ rām lachhmaṇ dā vīr kure,
chall darshan karlai jogī de...

Bringing flowers, the girls give a message to Hir...
 "There's a jogi, to which even an Inderpuri painting,
 Could not compare in beauty, Hir girl,
 As fitting as was Ram to Lachhman, girl.
 C'mon, let's go see the jogi"...

khēre ho sharmindā muṛ gae kolon ḍolī dion...
dam dam dā kī bhavāsā hai,
jiveñ pāñī de vich patāsā hai,
lajiā rām nām dī pherī ai,
ute charnān de manshā terī ai,
kite mel o hoṇ sababbān de...

The Kheras turned in shame from the palanquin...
 What confidence of strength they had,
 Is dissolved like a sweet dropped in water,
 By God, may I keep my honor,
 And place my head at your feet,
 Hoping somewhere there might be a reason for it all...
 (Didar Singh Ratainda)

charhiān mirzā nizām dīn o...
merīā lādliā,
tainūn kī kahān,
koī dīn kheḍ lai,
maut uḍīkdī, sir te kūkdī,
kūkān mārḍī, jānān nūn khārdī,
kachchīān lagarān nūn toṛdī,
o bhaur nimāñiān...

O mounted Mirza Nizam Din...
 O my precious one,
 What shall I say to you?
 Have your fun while you can;
 Death awaits, circling overhead,
 Screeching, as life wastes away,
 Breaking tender branches,
 O humble bumble-bee...
 (Bhoora Singh)

*lāl chiharā satī dā ho giā...
 koī din khed lai, maujān māṅ lai,
 taiṅ bhajj jāvṅā, o kangṅā kachch diā...*

The lady became flush and said...
 “Have some fun, enjoy yourself,
 Run along, O little glass bangle”...
 (Chain Singh and Satnam Singh)

*kaṭṭhīān ho ke kuṛīān deṅ sunehā hīr nūn...
 nāle sone dī tasvīr nūn,
 rugg bharke kaḍḍh liā kāljā...*

The girls gather together and give the message to Hir...
 “Compared to a figure of gold, can he be,
 Our heart has been captured and stolen away”...
 (Niranjan Singh)

Oftentimes, before the mukhra some couplet resembling the theme was recited; a number of these couplets became extremely popular among the general public and they have entered everyday discourse:

*uchchā burj barābar morī, dīvā kis vidh dharīe.
 nār bagānī ādar thorā, gal lagg ke nā marīe.*

In a small cubby up on a high tower, how shall one set a lamp?
 A foreign woman [wife of another] carries little respect;
 don't get caught with her.
 (Niranjan Singh)

*uchche chubāre maini chaṛhī, khaṛhī sukāvān kes.
 yār dikhāī de giā, karke bhagvān bhes.*

I climbed up to the top floor, and stood drying my hair.
There I caught sight of my lover, dressed, as it were, by God.
(Didar Singh Ratainda)

*suphaniān tainūn katal karāvānī, baiṭh giā mere chitt
rāṭī sutte do jāne din charḥde nūn ikk.*

In dreams I see you killed; my spirits sink with sorrow.
At night two people lie asleep; at daybreak there is just one.
(Didar Singh Ratainda)

*aḷaph es jahān te kauṅ āshak,
pāpī ishq jīhdā jhuggā paṭṭiā nā.
pāpī ishq jīhde magar lagg jāndā,
zindā vekh ke kadī vī haṭṭiā nā.
nāzar siān es ishq de vaṅaj vichoṅ,
naphā kise insān ne khaṭṭiā nā.*

What lover was there ever in this world
Whose sinful love did not cost him his home?
Behind which sinful love he follows
Like a zombie unaware of the world around him?
Naazar says, out of this business of love,
Nobody has gained any profit.
(Naazar Singh)

After the mukhra and before the *torā* [the closing phrase], within the presentation of the five or seven lines of the intervening (main) composition of verse, there would also come several back and forths. Among it all, at various places one's fellow performers would be encouraged with such comments as, "Bravo, Didar!" "Live long, Mahinga!" or "You're the best, Niranjan!" Didar Singh, after every line or two, used to utter, *haṭṭ-haṭṭ!* ("get along!").

At the end, in order to hasten the flow of singing and to impress the audience, a tora was executed consisting of one, two, or more lines. Typically this tora summarized the entire composition and laid out the pertinent facts of the text. The tora was an important aspect of this singing style. Some examples are as follows:

*vaṅjalī vāliā main arjān kardī terīānī,
mann lai darvesh dī
merī hū ve shukīnā
hai dam dā vasāh kī...*

O flute-player, I entreat you:
 Believe in the holy mendicant;
 My own breathing, O dandy boy,
 Cannot be trusted so...
 (Didar Singh Ratainda)

*terī hatth bahnn kardān bentī,
 ākhe laggjā, merīān mann lai,
 ho mālak merīā,
 devān maini sachch suṇā...*

I beg of you with hands clasped,
 Heed my words, believe what I say—
 O Lord of mine,
 I tell you the truth...
 (Didar Singh Ratainda)

*ākhe laggjā, laggjā merīān mann lai,
 oe ḍuhlliān berān dā kuchh nī bigariā,
 o chāke jholī vich pā lai
 ho pāgal rājīā...*

Heed my words, believe what I say—
 If the berries should spill, no damage is done.
 Just pick them up and gather them in your shirt,
 Oh you crazy Raja...
 (Niranjan Singh)

*tūn nā ro nā ro nā ro nī.
 tere rondī de kappre bhijge nī.
 munde kājīān de dārū pīṅ gijjh-ge nī.
 ghar paṇḍatān de murge rijjhge nī.
 tag tuṭṭ giā sārī duniān dā...*

Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry O!
 You've cried so much your clothes have become soaked O.
 The sons of judges are now binge-drinking liquor O.
 At the homes of priests, now chickens are being boiled O.
 All the world seems to have gone out of order...
 (Didar Singh Ratainda)

Some kali-reciters have toras of several lines, which become quite long. One finds such toras written like this in the kalis of Natha Singh Nararu and Hazura Singh:

*jagg darshan dā melā hai.
 aithe kaṇ gurū kaṇ chelā hai.
 kade ladd jū bhaur akelā hai.
 jehrā ajj karne dā velā hai.
 satiā ve tārjū.*

The world is a festival of encounters.
 Here, who is teacher and who is student?
 Sometimes a soul must find its fulfillment alone,
 And today is such a time.
 O universal powers, deliver me.
 (Nattha Singh Nararu)

*natthā singh de bachan amol kure.
 jāni nā thalān vich dol kure.
 mūnhoñ punnūñ nī punnūñ bol kure.
 sohñe yār nūñ lavengī tol kure.
 mil jāengī yār nūñ.*

Natha Singh's words are priceless, girl.
 Don't go stumbling into the desert, girl.
 Calling out, "Punnun, O Punnun!", girl.
 You'll search for your handsome lover, girl.
 You shall be reunited with him.
 (Nattha Singh Nararu)

*bheḍe jāñdī kī atar kapūrāñ nūñ.
 aimenī gangā kī nahlaunā sūrāñ nūñ.
 tatte tā kī deñe magrūrāñ nūñ.
 akal dassñī kī beshahūrāñ nūñ.
 khākhī bande dā mel kī hūrāñ nūñ.
 pāñī jhol kī haṭaunā būrāñ nūñ.
 kiññi rabb te chhapaunā nūrāñ nūñ.*

Sheep have little use for perfumes,
 Just as the Ganges is wasted on washing pigs.
 What use is it to hold a fire to the arrogant?
 Or to offer wisdom to the uncultured?
 What use have beautiful women for an uncouth man?
 What use is water to remove mold?
 Why hide light from God?
 (Hazura Singh)

jann chūchak vidā karāi ai.
kuṛī sabh siālān dī āi ai.
dhum chūchak vehare machāi ai.
gauṇ ṭoḍī rāg atāi ai.
āsā nāl bhairmī lāi ai.
sūhī pūrvī pīlo gāi ai.
dīp mālā megh suṇāi ai.
hūr tulī ne āṅ barāi ai.
māme ne chukk ḍolī vich pāi ai.

Chuchak saw off the procession.
 The prized girl of all the Sials has come.
 Chuchak shouted her praises from the courtyard.
 He performed a song in rag Todi,
 Mixing Asa and Bhairavi as he sang.
 Rags Suhi, Purvi, and Pilu were also sung,
 And rag Deep, strung along with Megh, he sang.
 Hir had to go, so came the bearers.
 Her uncle picked her up and put her in the palanquin.
 (Hazura Singh)

The Concert-arena Tradition

Another notable aspect of the folk dhadi genre is its performance-arena tradition. This sort of “arena”—called *akhārā* in Punjabi⁵—was not like the stage arenas of singers these days. These concerts were held outside of villages on the banks of a pond or in some other open space under the dense shade of a few large tree, or else at the religious-camps of the village. In those days there were no “loud speakers,” nor was any need for them felt. The minstrels’ voices themselves were so loud that they could reach all members of the audience. Indeed, the very “arena” style itself was different. Audience members would sit in a circular formation, and according to their number the circle shrank or grew. The artists would be in the middle of the circle, and by strolling about they would continually reach all the audience members. After reciting two stanzas to the audience members on the right side, they would move and recite the same stanzas to the people on the left. With this method they would have to repeat to each individual stanza four or five times; they would have to satisfy the entire audience. This is the arena style that today, too, their followers have adopted and which can be seen at melas like those at Jarg and Chhapar.

We can distinguish two main types of concerts:

- a. Concerts at melas;
- b. Booked or village-wide concerts.

These concerts went on for some time at the melas of Jarg, Chhapar, Jargraon di Raushni, Dussehra of Sangrur, and the Mandi of Sunam, and at some melas today, too, this tradition is still in place. To stage a concert at a mela would be pretty difficult, and as such it could be considered the moment of truth for artistes. A place would be reserved off to one side of the mela's crowds, in a secluded place below spacious trees. Audiences for these concerts would have been strolling about the mela until afternoon, at which point they would begin to gather in the arena. With cloths on their shoulders, they would lay down sheets, remove their fancy embroidered *juttis*, and lay their canes and staves on the ground before them. With an air of satisfaction and looking their best, they would at last sit down. The minstrels would enter the middle of the arena and enjoin the audience in a supplication of *fateh*, and the gaun would begin. All the while, people would also be enjoying shots of liquor. Some audience members would call the minstrels near and give them a shot, and the minstrels would clear away their mustaches with a hand and gulp it down. After some time, a state of intoxicated delight would prevail in the arena. Rupees would start to float about as cash donations. At this point there would begin a string of requests. The veteran minstrels would shrewdly negotiate these requests, consoling individuals where necessary as they kept strolling the arena, but inevitably several crazies here and there would complain. As such, the setting would also engender a clash of the various temperaments of audience members. Oftentimes old grudges between audience members of different villages would reemerge and the situation came to blows. Sometimes this fight even took a dangerous form as it transformed into the expression of a long-standing rivalry. Due to these sorts of clashes at melas, many villagers began to invite minstrels to stage concerts in their own villages. For example there is the concert held in one of Jarg's nearby villages, Jabbo Majra, which begins on the second day of the Jarg mela. Older informants claim that in the arena held at the Jarg mela there once was an altercation between Jabbo Majra people and Jarg people, such that the very next day, Jabbo Majra residents invited the minstrels to stage a concert in their own village. This custom continues today.

The second type of concert is the booked or invited type. These concerts are again of two types: one is village-wide while the other is private. The planning of village-wide concerts was done by the entire village on the festival day of some saint or holyman or on some other important occasion. The village panchayat would approach the area's

eminent artistes and, with due respect, invite them to put on a concert in the village. In these events the whole village would listen to the gaun with absolute reverence and respect, and the minstrels would be waited upon with great hospitality. Minstrels found no difficulty in this type of performance because all arrangements and decisions would be made prior. If individuals from a nearby village also came to hear the gaun, then they would abstain from any sort of unruliness. In some villages this tradition is carried on at the camps of holymen and shrines of saints. Such concerts are arranged every year or every second year at the wrestling matches in Salana, at the camps of saints in Heron/Jharon, and in villages Kurali, Gharachon, Ajnauda, and others.

From time to time, in order to present a tale in full, these minstrels would do it over the course of several days. The gaun of *Hir* was the longest; *Puran*, too, would go on for three days. When time was short, in place of the full tale the performers might also excerpt the main episodes. All this was according to the requests of the audience members and the span of time available. The time of the concert was usually also set according to the convenience of audience members. After the preliminary supplication, and having presented one or two other compositions, the audience members were asked what they would like to hear. In spite of divergent preferences, after some time they would arrive at a general consensus and the gaun would begin. Link by link the gaun was paid out for two and a half to three hours until, after arriving at some important point, the performance was adjourned until the next day, at which time the audience would again gather to hear the tale continued.

Of the invited concerts the second type were personally booked stagings. Affluent individuals in the village or special fans of gaun would arrange these to occur for their private, happy occasions. A son's *chhatī*,⁶ an engagement, or a wedding became the reason to stage concerts. The happy family would invite the artists at their own expense, however, the concert was held in the shared space of the village and all were invited. In those days there was no custom of having an enclosed festival-tent like today. Any audience member was free to encourage the minstrels with tips of a rupee or half-rupee. The scene of this sort of concert used to be very different. Rather than to the general audience, the minstrels paid special attention to the contentment of the patron family. The family served them in turn with ample liquor. Accordingly, minstrels would often stick to the gauns preferred by the family for most of the time.

Practice Regimen

A distinctive feature of the folk dhadi's art has been a continuous and strict practice regimen. Usually these dhadis were completely illiterate or practically so. They would have to learn the whole gaun by heart just by

hearing others, so their powers of memory would have to be very great. The greater someone's memory for repertoire was, the more popular he was. Therefore, they would have to practice strict discipline; continuous upkeep was necessary to keep their art polished. For this reason, many would leave hearth and home to live in the company of their masters for some 10-12 years. They would serve their masters well, considering it their paramount duty to take care of all kinds of work. The master's favourite disciples could, in turn, achieve more in less time. In performances they would invoke their master's name with pride, saying, "I am the disciple of such and such ustad." As such, the ancient master-disciple tradition has retained a special place in the dhadi genre.

Performance Attire

The dress of folk dhadis also bears noting. Dazzling white, starched turbans with fan (*furlā*). Jasmine-white tunics and blindingly white sheets. Pointed *juttīs* on the feet, which were splendidly embroidered and creaking [i.e. from newness]. Angular, trimmed beards and twirled mustaches. Kohl in the eyes. A silken handkerchief tied to the little finger of the left hand. In these ways their appearance was distinguished from regular folks'. The white color was a symbol of their learning, wisdom, and cleanliness. Like wrestlers were given training in good conduct and upright moral qualities by their masters, in the same way these minstrels were also given lessons in living a morally upright and "clean" life. Their intent was to communicate their "cleanliness in living" through the cleanliness of their attire, and in fact these appearances made a deep impression on audiences. Moving about the arena step by step, forward and back, they affected such postures as extending the right foot, lifting the arm up high, and tilting the torso forward while singing out, and as such they would charm their audiences. All these matters of dress and posture are in fact a part of this singing style.

Religion-neutral Character

One great peculiarity of the folk dhadi genre is its religion-neutral character. Being connected with various religions and castes, the performers have not fenced themselves into any one religious sphere, rather they have impartially presented all of Punjab's cultural and religious heritage. Muslim dhadis also reverently sang Hindu Puranic tales and episodes connected with Sikh history. Likewise, Sikh dhadis sang, from the heart, compositions connected with Hindu mythology as did Hindu dhadis sing episodes from Sikh history. Many dhadis in fact got their initial training in the camps of holymen, temples, and gurdwaras. The training in dhadi music was acquired at these religious-

camps along with education in folk culture and religious and prescriptive texts. One can consider the great achievement of Punjabi balladic art to be its blend of *ishq majazi* and *ishq haqiqi*—the worldly and the spiritual.

Historical Development

When we examine this art's history it becomes necessary to make some divisions, be they according to era, character, or some other dimension. So in order to expound the history of the folk dhadi genre I have divided it in the following three parts:

1. Dhadis who were recorded on phonograph disc;
2. Dhadis who were not recorded, but who were generally known among the public;
3. Dhadis who are presently/recently active.

Recorded dhadis

What we know of the sound of older folk dhadis today is that which has been preserved on commercial recordings. There is a bit we can say based on the evidence they provide. Although the work of preserving ideas in written form had begun long previously, the effort to preserve sound came much later. The first recording of Punjab's folk balladry was released in ca.1929-30. The voice was dhadi Didar Singh Ratainda's,⁷ which was recorded by the world famous recording company HMV (His Master's Voice). This record was of the kali of *Puran*, and included the episodes "Ichchharān dhārān mārđī" and "Sāmbh lai nagarī āpnī." It was released under the recording number HMVN 4527.

Another individual to have earned this honor for the genre is dhadi Niranjan Singh,⁸ whose performance of Ranjha and Sahiti's exchange [from *Hir*] was recorded on the Regal label (as number RL5). The individual who represented the apex of this phenomenon was the favorite dhadi of Punjabis, Amar Singh Shaunki.⁹ He issued scores of records and raised the level of respect for the art. During this era one finds recordings of Giani Ude Singh, Dalip Singh, Mohan Singh, Naazar Singh Doabewala, Bhoora Singh, Mehar Singh, Bakhtavar Singh, Ganga Singh, Dilavar Singh, Chain Singh and Satnam Singh, Massa Singh, Pal Singh Panchhi, Malkit Singh Pandher, and other folk dhadis, which continued up to the 1970s. After that, the recent generations, under the influence of Western culture, turned away from this art and the recording of it also ceased.

The compositions that were to be recorded were written or arranged according to the limitation of records, *viz.* that a disc needed to fit a complete composition (kali or var) of two and a half or three minutes. In

these kalis or songs (*gīt*), the most prominent episodes of folk ballads were presented. For example, out of *Hir*, there would be Hir and Ranjha's meeting, Hir's wedding, Ranjha's becoming a jogi, the description of Hir tormented by pangs of separation, Ranjha's going to Kheri, Ranjha and Sahiti's exchange, Hir and Sahiti's exchange, etc. Out of *Puran*, examples would be Puran's living twelve years in the underground cell, Lunan and Puran's exchange, Mansa Ram Wazir and Raja Salvan's exchange, Puran's meeting with Gorakh Nath, Puran's becoming a jogi, his going to beg alms in the palaces of Rani Sundran, his meeting with Ichharan [his mother], etc. Out of the var of *Jaimal-Fatta*, there is the episode of the reaction of Jaimal when Emperor Akbar requested his daughter be sent to him in a bridal carriage. Out of *Dulla Bhatti*, there is Dulla's mother's disclosure, Dulla's meeting with his fate, Dulla's battle with the Mughals, and the dialogue with Mehru Posti [his brother]. Out of *Dhol-Sammi*, there is the warning to Dhol by his parrot after he had gone to his father-in-law's. [Out of *Sohni*,] there is Sohn's words with the pot, [and out of *Sassi*,] there is Punnun's feelings of separation from sleeping Sassi, and Sassi's getting lost in the desert. One also finds recordings of compositions on assorted episodes from the tales of *Raja Rasalu*, *Kaulan*, and *Mirza*.

As for *Hir*, one mostly finds recorded the composition by Hazura Singh Butahri. However, some dhadis have recorded kalis of *Hir* that they have composed themselves. These include Didar Singh Ratainda, Niranjan Singh, Amar Singh Shaunki, Naazar Singh, and others. The *Puran* one usually finds on recordings is the version by Karam Singh Tuse. Much of what Amar Singh Shaunki recorded he actually wrote himself. The version of *Mirza* sung by Shaunki has become the most popular in Punjab. None can compare to the version of *Sassi* written and recorded by Ude Singh; it is still sung today in folk ballad competitions in college youth festivals.

In addition to HMV, other labels recorded the dhadi genre, including Regal, Young India, Columbia, The Twin, Nishat [Nishan?] Records, Hindustan Records, and Kohinoor Records. These companies improved the financial condition of dhadis through the royalties they paid. A few companies also helped dhadis in times of need due to illness.

The phenomenon of "loud speakers" [i.e. public address system] allowed these folk dhadis to easily reach the general public. Though recording playback equipment—gramophones—had been in use for a long time, their ambit had been small. Moreover, they were confined to personal use. Conversely, with the coming of loud speakers, recorded music was taken from the private to the public sphere. Each large village soon acquired a PA system, and without its use any joyous event was considered incomplete. On the roof, two cots were stood up tilted, making a sort of joint on top, in which the horn was hung. The

gramophone machine was wound with a key every time a new record was played. Records of regular folk-songs and duets played throughout the daytime. After around 9-10 o'clock at night, the kalis (i.e. records of folk dhadis) would begin. On still summer nights, both young lads and seniors, workers in the fields watering, and watchmen about their duties would listen with bated breath. Until after midnight, nothing but dhadi kalis would continue to play. Due to this custom, folks acquired a great love for the music of dhadis. People who previously had difficulty reaching performances [e.g. at melas] could now satiate their hunger for the music whilst seated at home listening to the records. On the other hand, recording companies and the dhadis alike benefited from the situation. The companies' records began to sell rapidly. Due to these sales the dhadis' esteem also began to increase, which translated into financial gain. Didar Singh Ratainda, Amar Singh Shaunki, Niranjan Singh, Naazar Singh, Mohan Singh, Pal Singh Panchhi, and others became beloved of the people through their recordings. And with this, their reputation grew and they made money.

From the above analysis it seems that we have in the folk dhadi genre a great and admirable recorded heritage. Alas, unfortunately it has not been preserved, even partially, by any sort of institution or cultural affairs department. Instead, it has been allowed to diffuse and languish here and there. Yes, a few enterprising individuals, in service of their own interest, have made an effort to preserve some recordings. These collectors include Prof. Baldev Singh Buttar of Ahmadgarh, Mr. Balkit Singh Pesi of Barvala, and a couple others. Cultural institutions or the Punjab Government's Cultural Affairs Department need to give some attention to this matter and preserve this scattered heritage. Otherwise, we will become bereft of this great heritage. Though so-called cultural institutions may spend hundreds of thousands of rupees on cultural programs, these achieve nothing; they are a misuse of people's money. We need to preserve our great cultural heritage and introduce it to the coming generations.

Unrecorded yet commonly known dhadis

There have been plenty of dhadis who, for whatever reason, could not have their voices recorded, and yet they enjoyed full glory and respect among the general public. There are a few reasons for their not being recorded. First, many were actually so old that the recording industry had yet to begin during their time of prime activity. A second reason was that, according to the telling of their descendants, the old generation had somehow gotten the notion that one's voice becomes bad after making records because the recording machines pull your voice and the vocal chords cave in. A third reason, claimed by the disciples of many old

dhadis, is that their masters did not make recordings so as to avoid jeopardizing their livelihood. Their concern was that, "Once people start to get our recordings, what use will *we* be? Who will book our services? Who will have us entertain them?" It is possible that to some extent they had a point, however, the situation they described cannot be considered wholly accurate. This is because the dhadis who have been recorded actually experienced an *increase* in fame and in respect among the public. From a monetary perspective, too, they have gained. Indeed, Amar Singh Shaunki, Didar Singh Ratainda, Niranjana Singh, Dalip Singh, Mohan Singh, and other dhadis became more loved due to recordings and their voices live on today. A fourth reason is that, perhaps despite wanting to record, due to lack of access they would not have been able to.

Upon close examination one thing becomes clear that the recorded dhadis were all Doabis and that those not recorded were all Malwais. Each displayed characteristic qualities of their respective areas. Doabis were sharp, informed, and progressive in thought and opinion. Conversely, Malwais were relatively simple, illiterate, superstitious, and backward-looking in thought. Moreover, they could not think about abandoning their hereditary customs.

These unrecorded, but nevertheless well-known, dhadis form a sizeable list. The consummate artist known as "Malwa's Tansen," Modan Singh of Loha Khara, was the erstwhile court dhadi of Maharaja Hira Singh of Nabha. Nageena Mirasi of Bathinda, Vadhaava Mirasi of Dhadde, Ruliya Mirasi of Rauala, the dhadis of Gurm, and Partap Singh Hasanpuria all received royal patronage. Others who became famous minstrels of their era include: Kaanshi Ram Dohlon; Khandu of Dohlon; Munshi of Jakhal; Dogar Teli of Chhapar; Husain Bakhsh, Khairdin, and Raj Muhammad of Gosal; the dhadis of Dayagarh; Khiddu Mochi of Gumti; Panj Garaiyanvala Dhadi; Munshi of Shero; Santa Singh of Shero; Magghar Shekh of Barnala; Puran Jhiur of Dhanaula; Daya Ram Pandit; Dalip Singh Deewal; Bali Singh of Bassi; Jeet Singh of Dhudike; Harnam Singh and Gindar Singh of Faridkot; Rahiman Khan of Gajjumajra; Jangir Singh Mungo; Rodu of Malooka; and Hari Singh of Takht Mal.

Contemporary dhadis

The dhadi genre remained pretty popular up to the 1960s. After that, like other aspects of culture, modernity and Western culture also greatly influenced this art. Its audience gradually dwindled, until the young generation completely set it aside. Only individuals from the old generation remained attached to the genre. Yet however dominant though modernity may be, it cannot completely erase old customs. Therefore,

despite all these circumstances, even today there are some individuals who remain connected with and maintain their heritage, though they number only a handful. Those that move about in dhadi circles in the current “era” include: Vilayat Khan of Gosal; Vidya Sagar of Dohlon; Raj Khan of Dayagarh; Gurmel Khan of Ajnauda; Sharif Idu of Lalaudha; Des Raj of Lachkani; Ujagar Singh of Bhamaddi-Chakohi; Pritam Singh of Utal; Niranjana Singh of Ghanaur; Arjan Singh of Guara; Bhagvan Singh of Payal; Sudagar Singh of Galab; Ram Singh of Salana; and Surjit Singh of Gurm.

When we examine the historical development of this genre one thing we notice is that it has actually diverged little from where it began. Compositions from 75-100 years ago have continued to be sung in the same form. The *Hir* by Hazura Singh Butahri, *Puran* by Karam Singh of Tuse, *Kaulan* by Bishna of Chugawan, *Dhol-Sammi* by Ali Shah of Ghudani-Ghaloti, the orally-transmitted *Mirza*, and others, which the original dhadis used to sing, have remained foremost. True, a few from time to time have broken the mold and left the beaten path to do original work. Among them, Amar Singh Shaunki is preeminent. In the place of widely known compositions he presented his original pieces, and for this he became a milestone figure in the history of the dhadi genre. Without him, Giani Ude Singh, Dalip Singh, and Naazar Singh Doabevala could not have left their creative stamp on this genre. Among contemporary folk dhadis, Gurmel Khan of Ajnauda is one such dhadi who, alongside the widely known compositions, also sings his original compositions.

A major force in the spread of this art before Partition was royal patronage. In royal courts, artists were especially revered. They were given tips and on special occasions they were bestowed with prizes and pensions. The Maharajas of Patiala, Nabha, Sangrur, and Faridkot fully patronized the artists of their states. However, after the patronage of these princely states came to an end [i.e. by the 1950s], these dhadis became destitute. Because of this, the genre also began to erode. Patronage of these dhadis has not been continued by the government nowadays. However, there certainly are a few such camps in Punjab, the holymen at which are their patrons. Among these are Sant Amar Nath Hiron of Jharon, Sant Amar Das of Bheeti (near Abohar), and Sant Baldev Muni on Jarg Road (near Khanna). As such, several concerts take place during the wrestling tournament in Salana that is held in memory of Sant Puran Gir. In fact, on that occasion the three-day long *Puran* is sung.

Thus we can easily perceive the pitiable current state of the folk dhadi genre. Though audiences of the latest generation have come to neglect it, some individuals of the older generation wish to keep the flame burning. Moreover, among the dhadis themselves there are some for whom this is their ancestral profession, which they cannot abandon. One cannot put a price on passion, as they say, and there are also some

who connect with this art to fulfill their avid personal interest. These are a few of the causes why, despite unfavorable circumstances and though it is taking its last breaths, the folk dhadi genre is yet alive.

Two Dhadi Profiles

Much of Thuhi's original book consists of short life-sketches of dhadi artistes from each of the preceding categories. The profiles of two presently-active dhadis are presented here, the rationale being that they are among the best known currently and, as such, have contributed to how many now perceive the secular dhadi genre. —G.S.

Des Raj Lachkani

In discussing the folk dhadi art we may make special mention of the name of Des Raj Lachkani. His may be counted among the names of the founders of contemporary folk dhadis who are committed to this art.

Des Raj was born at the time of Partition in village Lachkani (dist. Patiala) to father Madho and mother Bachni. Regarding his background, he says that they come from the [Muslim] Mardānā community.¹⁰ “My first name used to be Taj Muhammad. Our older folk, instead of leaving their homeland and for self-preservation, changed their religious affiliation here and so gave me the name Des Raj.” Des Raj was weened on music. His father used to play dholak to accompany the kirtan of Mahant Dharam Singh Kharaudh and Chhota Singh Kharaudh at the gurdwara in nearby village Lang. Des Raj actually received his initial education in the village primary school. He was accepted into 6th grade in Patiala, but he quit school before starting. Under the influence of the songs of Yamla Jatt and the kalis of Amar Singh Shaunki, he gravitated towards balladry, for which he satisfied his interest by singing with *tūmbī*.

Des Raj's uncle (*māsarī*), Gheechar Khan, who used to sing with sarangi, was once by chance giving a performance in village Lachkani. Des Raj was able to obtain training in his uncle's musical art from 1959-1963. However, the cruelty of fate was such that his voice completely went bad after that. For his own edification he continued to practice playing sarangi at home. In those days, at the compound of Sant Gulabpuri of Lasoi the holymen were supporting the dhadi art because at one time they, too, used to sing these ballads. Des Raj would provide services to the holymen while he continued to practice music at the compound. Thanks to the holymen's blessing and God's benvolence, his voice eventually got better. In 1982, after the holymen passed on and after a break of some twenty years, he once again embraced his old practice, along with his sons Urjit Khan and Albel playing dhadd. They

began to give performances at various melas. The first performance was held at the camp of the holymen of village Dakala (Patiala). After appearing at the *‘urs* held for saint Bhikam Shah in village Gharam (Patiala), and at the mela of Mirs in Kasiana (Patiala), and after moving on to the Dussehra celebrations of Raimal Majri and Kallar Bhaini (Patiala), and the melas of Chhapar and Jarg, he eventually made it to the cultural mela held annually in honor of Prof. Mohan Singh at the Punjabi Bhawan in Ludhiana.

Des Raj has also taken part in dhadi competitions. He won first place in the competition held by the Red Cross Society of Patiala in 1991. He has taken part in “dhadi darbars” in Ludhiana, Firozpur, Bathinda, and elsewhere. Since 1991 he has been the established folk dhadi associated with the Doordarshan center in Jalandhar.

Des Raj is a total master of the sarangi. His fingers float upon the fingerboard like ripples upon water, and he compels even the most finicky audiences to listen. He can play just about anything on the instrument. In addition to dhadi music, he also plays modern tunes and algoza-style pieces on sarangi with great finesse.

Since 1988 he has also been accompanied by his cousin (son of *māmā*), Banarsi Khan Urf Varis of Gopalpur. As is traditional, Des Raj sings the compositions of the old poets. That is to say, he sings the widespread folk tales in the ballad forms of *kali* and *var*, such as *Hir* by Hazura Singh Buthahri, *Puran* by Karam Singh Tuse, and the old, orally-transmitted *Mirza*. As such he has a fine grasp of the dhadi musical genre.

Hazura Singh’s *Hir*, composed of countless *kalis*, has remained the favorite of dhadis of Malwa and very popular amongst the people. When rendered in Des Raj’s voice, hearing his drawn-out melodies and his high-pitched *hek*, audience members are rendered breathless:

jadoñ rānjhā mur̥ke ā giā rangpur kheriāñ toñ,
humm hummā ke kur̥iāñ siālāñ dīāñ āiāñ.
miṭṭhī naiñ pahunchā phar̥ke mūhare bahigī ai,
gallāñ dass chobarā jo ḍāḍhe varatāiāñ.

When Ranjha returned from Rangpur and the Kheras’,
 Sial girls came out in throngs.
 “Your sweet eyed beloved, dragged off, has been delivered to
 them.
 Tell us, boy, of your hardships.”

*kaṭṭhīān ho ke kuṛīān deṅ sunehā hīr nūnī,
nāle jogī vālīān dassdīān hai vaḍīāān.
joṛ disīā bhābo tere, sāḍe hāṅ dā,
rabb dī sūrat siphtān jāṅ nā suṅāān.*

The girls get together and send a message to Hir,
Full of compliments about the jogi (Ranjha).
We've sighted your mate, sis, that boy of our age group.
Like the face of God, words are insufficient to praise him.

*jadoṅ rānjhā panchhī vaṅ giā vich trinḡhaṅān de,
charkhe chhaḍḍ ke kuṛīān kol nāth de āīān.
neṛe ho ho bahindīān sūrat dekh faqīr dī,
ikk toṅ ikk chahṛendī karān kī vaḍīāān.*

When Ranjha (as jogi) entered the spinning-bee,
The girls abandoned their wheels and came over by the jogi.
Sitting nearby and gazing upon the face of this faqir,
From one to another what complements they exchanged!

At a program related to the old folk balladry of Punjab created by the Language Department Punjab, at the time when scholars in folklore read their papers, Des Raj's group presented various examples of balladry and received praise. And at Punjabi University's Folk Music Mela of January 2000, he was awarded with a gold medal.

Sharif Idu Lalaudha

Among the contemporary generation of folk dhadis, Sharif Idu needs no introduction. He represents folk dhadis for the North Zone Cultural Centre. By means of the Centre he has made a respectful showing for this folk art of Punjab in various states of India.

Sharif was born around the time of Partition in village Lalaudha (tehsil Nabha, dist. Patiala) to father Idu Khan and mother Jeevi. His very first cries were heard mixed with the tones of sarangi and the rhythms of dhadd. His father, Idu Khan, was an eminent folk singer of the area. As the saying goes: "If the child of a Mir (Mirasi) cries, even that he does in tune." Such was the case of Sharif, whose lullabies were even accompanied by music. Thus Sharif became part of the ballad-singing world.

Though Sharif was brought up in the world of his ancestral profession, his coming of age as a singer did not occur until he sang at a wedding at the home of film actor and bhangra pioneer Manohar Deepak. All who heard his performance praised him. From that point, Sharif's

journey in ballad-singing began and, joining his name with his father's, he became "Sharif Idu." Sharif himself played sarangi. He put his nephew, Murlī Khan, and eldest son, Nusrat Ali, on dhadd, and created his dhadi group.

In 1986, when the "Cultural Revolution" was going on in India, Sharif was noticed by the management of the North Zone Cultural Centre. At the time he was supporting his family by pushing around a hand-cart in the town of Manī Majra (near Chandigarh). Under the auspices of the Cultural Centre he has demonstrated his folk art in various states of the country, in the course of which he went to a festival in the nation's capital, Delhi [Apna Utsav]. In this program he first performed an *alāp* [melismatic, unmetred improvisatory section] followed by a *hek* that was so long that the audience got up and cheered. The prime minister of that time, Rajiv Gandhi, had special praise for this Punjabi dhadi.

Sharif sings *Hir* with great feeling. His voice, strident and full of ardour, fills one's soul with the theme. Besides *Hir*, he sings kalīs and vars of the widespread and well-known ballads like *Sassi*, *Mirza*, *Puran Bhagat*, *Kaulan Bhagatni*, and *Dulla Bhatti*. While all those are written by older poets, he, too, actually sings the *Hir* of Hazura Singh Buthahri. Some stanzas are as follows:

ghare chhaddke āṅ udāle hoīān jogī de.
kuṛīān jāṅ ke hamānī karan ṭhaṭholīān.
mukhat nazārā lai ve ik te ik chahṛendī dā,
kuṛīān kheṛīān dīān ve parīān subak mamolīān.

Leaving their pots, they came around the jogi.
 Treating him as an equal, the girls teased him.
 One by one they take a free peep.
 The girls of the Kheras are prim and trim fairies.

chhadḍo khiāl merā tusīn jāvo āpṛe gharān nūn,
tusīn laiṅā kī nī santān nūn santā ke.
rangpūr munḍe bathere maithoṅ sohṅe hassṅe nūn,
asān tān rūp āpṅā kho liā kann parvāke.

Leave me be; I think you should go to your homes,
 What do you hope to gain, harassing an ascetic?
 There're plenty of lads in Rangpur better looking than me.
 Indeed I have ruined my good looks by getting my ears bored.

Sharif's entire family is connected with the musical profession. His brother, Sadiq Muhammad Allah of Darza, is a classical singer. His

nephew, Nile Khan, is a renowned qawwali at present. As for his own son and nephews, most all are connected with this art in some way or another.

Among the old dhadis, he considers Sharif Gurmanvala to have been the top dhadi of his time.



Fig. 1. The dhadi group of Sharif Idu and sons, Sukhi Khan, Vicky, and Dildar, 2006. Photo: G. Schreffler.

The Preeminent Composers of Folk Dhadi Compositions

In discussing folk dhadi performers I have also made frequent reference to the composers whose compositions have been sung by them. One great distinction of these composers (*kavishars*) is that all of them (save one or two) were renowned kavishars or dhadis of their time. The fact is that these composers had begun as singers and only afterwards, due to necessity, started writing. Their compositions became so widely popular that, for their students and for dhadis and kavishars who came afterwards, they became like sacred texts.

From their lifestyles and from their compositions it is evident that these composers, along with their training in poetics, would have also deeply analyzed ancient and contemporary texts. Through the training of

their poetry masters, community involvement, and hard work, their creations became established as milestones in folk literature. They replaced the traditional Arabic- and Persian-based principles of qissa-poetry with the methods of Indian prosody to adopt new principles. About the significance of prosody, the famous kavishar Ganga Singh Bhoondar writes:

*vidvān sōi jihṛā mān ko tiāg deve,
dhanvān sōi jihṛā dān meṅ parvīn hai.
gītā binān giān ate pingal bagair chhand,
bhog kok binān, pūchh pashū parādhīn hai.*

A scholar is he who renounces arrogance;
Wealthy is he who is adept at giving.
There is no scripture without wisdom nor meter without prosody
Nor intercourse without method; the *animal* must wag the tail.

Besides prosody these poets have also kept the poetic-meters (*chhand*) close to Indian structures. In the place of qissa-poetry's famous meter, *baint*, they have employed *kabitt*, *doharā*, *korarā*, *kundālīā*, *bhavānī*, *kālī*, etc. The "kali" especially is a significant contribution by these poets to Punjabi poetic-literature, and which is a form belonging purely to the kavishars of Malwa. Ganga Singh Bhoondar used this meter in several compositions. The entirety of Hazura Singh's *Hir* is in this meter. Ran Singh also wrote *Hir* in kalis, as did Bansi Ram Nauhra. Natha Singh Nararu set his *Sassi* and Dila Ram Bhoodan set his *Bego Nar* in kali meter. Indeed, this is the favorite meter of folk dhadis, and as such the foregoing compositions continue to be sung by them.

Another distinction of these poets is the way they have contibuted a Puranic basis to widely known tales. When narrating the traditional love stories they have adopted Indian mythic tales. In Ran Singh's *Hir*, Ranjha was Dev Raj Indar's son, Jain, in an earlier birth and Hir was Karam Pari's daughter, Bhag Pari. Both used to love one another [in their previous lives]. Due to Inder's curse, they were born as mortals. In Ganga Singh Bhoondar's *Hir*, Ranjha is described meeting not Guru Gorakh Nath or Khwaja Pir, but rather Guru Nanak Dev. In Hazura Singh's *Hir*, the anecdote about the *paṭkā* (length of cloth) is also an example of this. These elements have become naturalized within the tales. The reason for this is the traditional way that these poets acquired their training. They all got it at the village compounds of holymen, where, side by side with gaining literacy and poetic-knowledge, they studied religious texts. The imprint of this textual analysis upon their unconscious minds subsequently came to the fore here and there in their compositions.

These composers (kavishars) have given the poetic literature of Punjab compositions that are great in every respect. Their imagery, metrical contributions, and plain and direct language are some of the qualities on the basis of which we might call these masterpieces in form. Unfortunately, many among them are unpublished. This orally-composed literature has been maintained solely by dhadis and kavishars, and much has been lost along the way. We need to research and collect these, and to preserve them in the form of a book.

Selected Compositions

Thuhi includes 67 excerpts from ballad compositions in his book, Panjābī Lok Ḍhādī Kalā. The following pages contain examples selected from among them.

From *Hīr*, by Didar Singh Ratainda

*chakk ke jhammaṅ dā laṛ hīr bahigī dolī ‘ch,
rānjhe khahṛe ne duhatthaṛ paṭṭīn māri.
ho akelā bahi giā jhugaṛmāṭā mārke,
hubkīn hubkīn rondā hai jāro o jāri.
labbiā lāl lakkhānī dā khoḥ liā siālān ballīe nī,
kauḍī ghāṭe vālī jāve nā sahāri.
birahoṅ kasāi andar vaṛ giā rānjhe chāk de,
katle kar kar dhardā sīne dhar laī āri.
shor mashorī sabh muṭiārān hoīān pinḍ dīān,
kuṛī maseriān dī ne bāt oe vichāri.
kāmā rakkhīe tānī mazdūri deīe usnūnī,
khālī toran de vich vaḍḍī nī deṇe dāri.
rabb hasāb mangū lekhā laū akhīr nūnī,
thoṛī gall te ho gāi narkānī dī adhkāri.
mīṭṭhī naiṅ sabbhe kuṛiānī ākhaṅ hīr nūnī,
kī phal khaṭṭiā rānjhe lā tere nāl yāri.
sabar sabūri karke takht hazāre nūnī uṭhī jū nī,
kauḍī ghāṭe vālī jāve nā sahāri.*

Hir lifted the corner of the curtain and sat in the palanquin.
Ranjha stood there beating himself in frustration.
Then he sat down alone, covering himself,
Sobbing and sighing he weeps bitterly.
He'd been cheated as out of a fortune by the Sials, huzza—
Such a bitter loss as may not be endured.
Heartbreak the Butcher entered the cowherd Ranjha,
Slaughtering and laying into him with its hacksaw.
All the maidens of the village were in a tumult.
One of the cousins expressed a thought:
If you engage a worker, then give him work to do;
He should not go away empty-handed.
God must determine in his final reckoning,
If a trifling matter is deserving of Hell's flames.
"Sweet eyed-one," all the girls say to Hir,
"What was gained by Ranjha in his friendship with you?"
Keep patient, off you go to Takht Hazara O!
Such a bitter loss as may not be endured.

* * *

From *Pūran*, by Niranjan Singh

*santānī nūn matthā ṭek ke,
 achchharānī dindī arj guzār.
 bhalī hoī siddh utare,
 bāgān de vichkār.
 ih bāg sī mere puttār dā,
 jithe sabz dī sī bahār.
 vich būṭe sī rang rang de,
 māli baiṭhe khidamatgār
 uhnūn hoṇī ne chahṛke māriā,
 lai giā oe parvardagār.
 pichhoṇ pattak baṇā te bāg de,
 būṭe sukk ke ho gae chār.
 jidhare uṭh gae bānīeṇ,
 udhare gae bajār.
 maiṇ udoṇ dī ahnnī ho gāi,
 hoīā akkhīān meṇ nehr gavār.
 netar hoṇ siān lānī,
 terī vekhān ve shakal nihār.
 rūh merī phirdī bhāṭakdī,
 mūnhon bol ikk vār.*

Paying respects to the saints,
 Rani Ichharan makes a supplication:
 “Blessed saint, may you come down,
 Among the gardens.
 This garden was my son’s,
 Where spring sprang green.
 In which there were saplings of many colors,
 And gardeners sat attendant.
 Fate came upon and killed him,
 Took him away, did the Sustainer.
 After which there was a curse upon the garden,
 The sprouts dried and became few.
 Wherever you find merchants,
 You’re sure to find markets.
 From then on I became blind;
 Darkness overcame my eyes.
 Though my eyes are such I might yet recognize you,
 I might still see your face O!
 My soul roams and wanders,
 Hoping to hear you speak one time.

* * *

From *Mirzā*, by Amar Singh Shaunki

do āshak desh panjāb de,
ik gabbhrū te mūtiār.
ik sāhibān jhang siāl dī,
jo parīān dī sardār.
jaṭṭ mirjā dānābād dā,
jo bakkī dā asavār.
doveṅ bībo de ghar baiṭhke,
lagge karan vichār.
sāhibān ākhe mirjiā,
ve suṅ lai merī gall.
huṅ kī soch vichārdā,
ve tur chhetī uṭh chall.
chhadḍ deṭe jhang siāl ve,
ghayī nā lāṭe pal.
us sohṅe dānābād dā,
ve rastā lāṭe mall.
mirjā ākhe sāhibān,
kuchh kar lai soch vichār.
vich maidānān jang nī,
kite khā jāvīn nā hār.
raste vich mān bāp dā,
tainūn ā nā jāe khiāl.
tūn muṅ siālān dī ho jāeṅ,
te mainūn kareṅ khuār.
tere bājhoṅ sohṅiān,
koī hor piārā nā.
nā bhainān nā vīr ve,
nā bābal nā mān.
mainūn sohṅā des panjāb choṅ,
ve dānābād garān.
main bhairē jhang siāl vich,
ve muṅ nā pher pān.
ik vārī ghar bāp de,
tūn sāhibān muṅ ke jāh.
tūn jāke vich parvār de,
pher dil nāl karīn salāh.
tūn sāre pāse sochke,
dil pakkī laiṅ pakā.
tān pher phayīn yakīn nāl,
laṅ shaunkī jaṭṭ dā ā.

There were two lovers of the land of Punjab,
A lad and a lass.
One was Sahiban of the Sials of Jhang
Who was Queen of the Fairies.
The Jatt, Mirza, was of Danabad,
Who rode a steed called Bakki.
Both, sitting in their mom's house,
Began to form an idea.
Sahiban said, "Hey Mirza,
Listen to my idea."
Now, what do you think?—
Let us quickly get up and go.
And leave Jhang-Sial,
Without a moment's delay.
The beautiful road to Danabad,
Is the one we shall take."
Mirza said, "Sahiban,
Think it over a bit.
On the fields of battle,
Nowhere should one suffer defeat.
On the road, of your mother and father,
Would you not think?
You might return to the Sials,
And forsake me."
"Besides you, handsome one,
I've no other love.
No sisters nor brothers O,
No father nor mother.
Out of all the land of Punjab,
I find village Danabad best.
To rotten Jhang-Sial,
I ne'er would return."
"One time, to your father's house,
Sahiban, go back.
Go back among your family
And with your heart take counsel.
Think on all the ramifications
And set your heart when sure.
And then grasp with surety
This Jatt's hand in marriage," says Shaunki.

* * *

From *Sassī*, by Ude Singh and Dalip Singh

sassī thal vich labhdī yār nūnī,
rondī nā dhardī dhāh.
uhdīān gal vich julphān khuhllīān,
bhājī jāndī vāho dāh.
bālū ret sī tapiā thalān dā,
chhāle ubhre pairān ‘te ā.
mainūn chāhṛke bere ishḡ de
kite deīn nā ḡob dariā.
merī chahṛdī javānī sohṇīān,
vich deīn nā ḡob dariā
ve tūn suttī chhaḡḡ ke tur giā,
dassīn main vich kī gunāh.
dīl vich machchde hai bhāmbaṛ ishḡ de,
pāṇī piār dā pāke bujhā.
sassī lae haṡkore ude siān,
rahī kūnj vāng kurlā.

Sassi, in the desert, searches for her lover,
 Weeping and wailing,
 Her open locks in her face,
 Scurrying around in an agitated state.
 The sand of the desert was well and hot.
 Blisters swelled up upon her feet.
 “I being ferried by the Ship of Love,
 Nowhere shall you let me drown in the river.
 My blossoming adulthood, O handsome-one,
 Don’t let it drown in the river.
 Oh you left me and went off while I was asleep.
 Tell me, what was my error?
 In my heart burn the flames of Passion.
 Extinguish them with the water of Love.”
 Oh how Sassi sobbed, Ude brother,
 Shreiking like a crane!

Notes

¹ This article has been compiled and translated from text that originally appeared in Thuhi's *Panjābī Lok Dhāḍī Kalā*, Tarkash Publications, Malerkotla, 2001, pp. 12-37, 67-68, 112-114, 145-147, 148-149, 162-164, 181, 207-210, 227-228.

² Nabha, Kahn Singh. 1998[1930]. *Gurushabad Ratnākar Mahān Kosh*. Delhi: National Book Shop.

³ It is unclear exactly what "folk-songs" Thuhi means here. —*Ed.*

⁴ A *kavishar* is a performer of *kavishrī*, a Punjabi genre of unaccompanied poetic recitation in a group. —*Ed.*

⁵ In Punjabi discourse on popular music, a live performance before an audience is called *akhārā* (compare with *mahifil*, which has connotations of a more "classical" sort). The word applies to both the performance-locale ("arena" or "stage") and the performance-event ("concert" or "show"). Whereas in the past concerts were given with the performers on the same level as and near the audience, contemporary performances on elevated stages are still referred to as *akhārā*. —*Ed.*

⁶ A ceremony held on the sixth day after a child's birth. —*Ed.*

⁷ As per elsewhere in Thuhi's text: Didar Singh Ratainda was born circa 1893 in village Ratainda in district Jalandhar. He died some time after 1947.

⁸ As per elsewhere in Thuhi's text: Niranjan Singh (ca.1908-1986) came from village Jamsher in district Jalandhar. His recordings of Hir came out around 1930-31.

⁹ As per elsewhere in Thuhi's text: Amar Singh Shaunki was born in 1916 in village Bhajjal of district Hoshiarpur. His first recordings date from 1938.

¹⁰ "Mardana" is an ethnic community that falls within the larger category that outsiders would call "Mirasi." —*Ed.*

